1:Williams E,G-5 (1923-1925) 1930
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

the mourners at a funeral may be startled by any noise in the surrounding bush, the breaking of a twig for instance, which they will attribute to the *sovai* of the deceased. Approaching a village where a death had occurred in the early morning, I once heard a hissing noise in the scrub close to the track. I imagined that it was probably the hissing of a snake, but when I asked the native who accompanied me he answered in rather matter-of-fact tones that it was the *sovai* of the man who had died that morning. When I told the villagers some time afterwards they immediately gave the same explanation, and that without any collusion. It seems, then, that the first idea of the *sovai* is of something quite ethereal and invisible which haunts the village and betrays its presence by movements or noises. And the *sovai* may long remain in this immaterial form. It is thought sometimes to haunt houses and afflict their inmates with sickness. It also visits the gardens, and both here and in the villages may be seen small platforms (*barau*) of food offerings, sometimes with miniature ladders of the most fragile construction to assist the *sovai* in climbing up (Plate XXXV*a*).

But the *sovai* may appear, more or less disembodied, in human form. When one evening my boys were telling each other spookish stories, one of them, an Orokaiva, suddenly scrambled across the hut and sat there trembling in every limb. He had looked out into the darkness and seen the figure of a man recently dead in the village: what first drew his attention, he said, was the smell of death which attached to the *sovai*. Such hallucinations are of common occurrence. One hears of a mother who was mourning the death of her daughter, when she looked up and beheld the girl dancing before her in all her finery. Following the girl, who danced backwards into the bush, she suddenly found herself surrounded by *sovai* in human form, whom she thought to be hostile warriors. In such cases, of course, the *sovai* is an apparition or ghost in the usual sense of the word. So also the dead constantly reappear to dreamers in their familiar living form. Again, in the legends the *sovai* are eminently human though sometimes betrayed by some small evidence of death; as when the youth slain in fight returned in *sovai*

1:Williams E,G-5 (1923-1925) 1930
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

'Had they but kept us we might have been good children who could work and make sago for them.'

Destination of Sovai

Where beliefs as to the nature of *sovai* are so confused and indefinite we need not expect to find a carefully formulated doctrine as to their habitat or destination. Nightbound in a lonely place, a native would feel positive that the *sovai* were ubiquitous, and if they abounded in one place more than another it would be in his own vicinity. But when his fears were calmed, he could expound some more specific theories, albeit not entirely consistent.

In the first place the *sovai* are felt to haunt the village they lived in as men. I have already given evidence of this belief in relation to the ghostly form of the *sovai* (*vide* pp. 270–2), and it appears that this haunting may be more than merely temporary. There is a custom called *peni*, i.e. 'gift-offering', in which a number of young men do a round of the village carrying a pig on a pole or some cooked food on a dish. Beating their drums as they go, they pause at every house and lay the pig for a moment on the verandah platform, or leave there a morsel of cooked food. This ceremony is a placation of the *sovai* which are thought to haunt the houses. Sometimes it is not the actual village, but the neighbouring bush that is inhabited by the *sovai*. Of this idea the most interesting illustration is the custom of *jage* or hailing, in which the *sovai*, being called by name, gives answer in a long-drawn inarticulate cry from the concealment of the forest.

It seems that in the main, however, it is the *sovai* of the more recently dead who are thought of as frequenting the village. The mortuary ceremonies are at least in part intended as placations of them; and when all due honours have been paid, the final ceremony, viz. *sirari* (*vide* p. 253), is apparently a means of getting rid of the *sovai*, or inducing it to leave the village for good and all. Thus, for example, at the conclusion of a cycle of mortuary ceremonies in the village of Suporosusu certain paraphernalia of the dance were placed on the raft and floated down the river

1:Williams E,G-5 (1923-1925) 1930
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

In his general conduct the less kindly emotions are often in evidence. Sometimes they find expression in open hostility, and we find the villagers defying and actually doing battle at night with a host of imaginary foes. Usually, however, it is the anxious endeavour of the living to placate the dead. Therefore we find the offerings of food in the village and in the gardens, and witness the performance of a mortuary ceremony which seems in the main of a placatory nature. Besides these we see the presentation of formal gifts, a handful of costly ornaments offered to the departing *sovai* at the grave-side, or suspended before the door of a house of sickness to induce the *sovai* to discontinue his persecution.

While it is certain that the Orokaiva goes in real fear of the power of the *sovai*, the means of placation often seem peculiarly off-hand. All gifts, as far as I know, are given only to be taken back, or at the most they fall into the hands of the magician or healer who acts, so to speak, as intermediary, and, if the patient recovers, annexes the presents which were ostensibly meant to buy off the *sovai*. There is seldom any deliberate sacrifice of real valuables, as, e.g., by burying them. I may quote what purports to be the true case of an old man who was unable to recall his dog from a hole in which it had pursued some animal. Concluding the dog must have been seized by a *sovai* who lived in the hole, he placed some ornaments at the entrance by way of a bribe, but no sooner did his dog reappear than he snatched up the ornaments and ran for dear life to the safety of his village, the more speedily because he was convinced that he heard the pursuing footsteps of the *sovai*. It is difficult to reconcile such hocus-pocus with the genuine fear of the *sovai* which motivates so much of an Orokaiva's conduct; but whatever form it may take, the act of placation is felt to be necessary and is constantly performed.

Besides the placation of the *sovai* by ceremonial gifts we find some traces of direct appeal or prayer.[1] I do not feel justified in applying this word to the *kasamba*, i.e. the concerted singing of the Taro men (which is described in the 'Taro Cult', pp. 37 ff.), though there is good reason to

[1] *Vide* further *Orokaiva Magic*, p. 207.

1: Williams E,G-5 (1923-1925) 1930
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

suppose that the now somewhat garbled songs are in origin hortatory. The exhortation, however, is addressed rather to the taro itself or the spirit (*asisi*) of the taro, and I have no definite instance in which the song is addressed to the *sovai*. But the definite instances are not wanting elsewhere. We need go no further than the grave-side address, to which reference has been made so often, where the *sovai* is requested to send pigs to the hunters and prosper the gardens. Again, apart from the ritual *kasamba*, the Taro Cult provides examples of what we may call genuine prayer, when the Taro man in the act of planting calls on the *sovai* of his mother, father, and grandfather to make his taro flourish.

But the most interesting examples are perhaps those connected with hunting. The Aiga villager says that the new moon is the time to set up his *bage*, or pig-trap, and then after dusk he will cry, *sostenuto*, into the darkness of the bush:

Hariga, Hoindapa, Bavari . . . &c.
Moon, Hoindapa, Bavari . . .
Bage etenavara, Hambuto batijo araikai.
A trap I have set, go, leap on it and break it.

How the moon comes into the prayer I cannot say, for there is nothing in the least resembling a moon cult among the Orokaiva; but the names Hoindapa, Bavari, and the string of place-names that follow are of *sovai-ta-na*, and it is explained that the prayer is addressed to the spirits of the dead who inhabit them. The ensuing words are of course addressed to the pig, telling it to enter the trap to its destruction, and they are no more than an elementary spell in which the hunter utters in words what he wants to happen in fact.

Mr. Flint gives the following account of the same practice as carried out by a hunting party. One of their number is requested to hail the spirits.

'He does so by tapping his throat lightly, and warbling simultaneously. Having aroused the spirits, he calls out vociferously, "We come with our dogs or nets, you send plenty of pigs straight to us." As I was very interested in this alleged communication, I asked my informants if the spirits listened to their talk. I was informed, "Oh, yes, if he did not listen, we would catch no pigs".'[1]

[1] *Annual Report*, 1924–5, p. 48.

1:Williams E,G-5 (1923-1925) 1930
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

Lastly, there are the sporadic instances of the personal and semi-legendary *sovai*, who may be hailed and exhorted to grant a favour or pardon an intrusion. But such direct appeals are of relatively small importance. The aim of the Orokaiva is to appease or to win the favour of the *sovai*, and his regular methods are those of placation by gifts and ritual.

I may now repeat what was written towards the beginning of this chapter, viz. that on the whole Orokaiva religion concerns itself primarily with the spirits of the dead. The *sovai* are viewed as beings both powerful and dangerous, and it behoves the living to keep on the right side of them. It is not to be supposed that an all-embracing philosophy regards the *sovai* as the guiding and controlling spirits of all nature. The native is not urged on by a philosophic inquisitiveness which demands an interpretation for everything. The phenomena of nature are largely taken for granted, and when things are going well he is content to ask no questions. He does not theorize upon the movements of the sun, for instance, and postulate some personal entity—*sovai* or any other—that makes it rise and set. But in the face of calamity or sickness, or any hitch in the course of nature, he may cast about for a cause, some one or something on which to fix the responsibility, and perhaps his favourite scapegoat is the *sovai*. The *sovai*, therefore, are not conceived of as invariably presiding over the course of nature, but rather as being able to influence the course of nature for or against living humans. Further, because of their somewhat malevolent disposition, they are exceedingly prone to the latter kind of interference, so that it is the very essence of Orokaiva religion to placate them.

1:Williams E,G-5 (1923-1925) 1930
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

Ena saireri! which are the proper expressions used in hailing the *sovai* animal and are in this instance addressed to the *sovai* which the operator hopes to cast out of his patient. In other cases the Baigona doctor would simply place his lime-gourd and coco-nut-leaf basket one on either side of the sick man so that they might attract the disease (i.e. the *sovai*) out of his body into themselves. Again, in the most typical of expulsive treatments, viz. that of *bara*, it may be the *sovai* which is removed from the patient, symbolized, e.g. by a tuft of the dead man's hair. It is not necessary to give further examples to show that *sovai* diseases as well as casual diseases are amenable to the expulsive method.

Placatory Treatments

There is, however, another method which is applicable to the former and not the latter. This is the method of placation, which to the native is as much a treatment of disease as is the use of the knife or the draught of medicine. The method is best exemplified by the practice of making offerings to the *sovai* in order to induce it to leave the sufferer. Thus we find sets of feathers or ornaments suspended in the village: they are meant for the *sovai* in general, or for some particular *sovai*—probably that of some recently deceased relative of the sick man. It is seldom that such offerings are actually abandoned to the *sovai*: it appears that they usually fall into the hands of the doctor who is attending the case. Natives are very reticent on this subject because they realize that the acceptance of payment for their cures is not always looked on with favour by the Government (the good reason being that, as the characters of the healer and the sorcerer are so mixed together, the acceptance of fees may degenerate into extortion). We may perhaps accept what is often enough stated to be the rule, viz. that the doctor retains payment only if the patient recovers.[1] So we come

[1] The Rev. Copland King relates a corroborative incident. He had allowed a Baigona healer to try his methods on a mission boy who was dying of consumption. 'Eroro visited Frank every day to see what effect the treatment had. When he found it had done no good, he brought back the pay which had been given, and said that it was a sickness that Frank had brought from the white man's country, and his charms were of no avail. He replaced all but the tobacco, which had been already smoked, and gave necklaces to make up the value.' *Annual Report*, 1912–13, p. 154.

1:Williams E,G-5 (1923-1925) 1930
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

upon a doctor carrying a bunch of valuable ornaments to his house. They have been handed to him by the husband of a woman who is apparently dying. He explains that he is about to hang them up on his house verandah as an offering to the *sovai* of a man not long deceased, who is supposed to be afflicting the sick woman. If this *sovai* wishes the woman to recover he will accept the presents (which means that they will remain in the possession of the doctor); if he allows the woman to die, then the doctor will return them to her husband, for they have not achieved their purpose.[1]

Apart, however, from these eleventh-hour acts of placation, there are the daily observances which have been constantly referred to in earlier chapters, and these may be regarded as in some degree a prophylactic placation; for they are not meant only to ensure general prosperity, but especially to ward off the sickness which *sovai* malignancy is so fond of inflicting.

In so far as sorcery disease admits of any cure, that cure also is a matter of placation. It is a case of 'squaring' the sorcerer. I have already pointed out that the doctor—whatever his speciality, be it *humbari*, *bara*, or any other—acknowledges his inability to deal with a case that he diagnoses as sorcery; and it has been seen that it is just then, when his stock remedies have been applied without success, that he falls back on this diagnosis. I have seen a Baigona man, celebrated as he was for his powers, stand aside assuming an air of complete indifference while a dying patient was surrounded with wailers. He had tried his own methods without avail, therefore he did not hesitate to say that the

[1] The doctor's responsibilities were indeed sometimes rather severe. I have myself been privately requested to hale one of them before the magistrate for his refusal or inability to effect a cure, and Mr. A. E. Oelrichs, a former Resident Magistrate of the Northern Division, gives the following extreme instance. 'A man had undertaken to cure a sick woman, and had received from her son-in-law as payment for his "few passes" a dog and a pig as well as some native ornaments. "Unfortunately, he returned next day, and, while in the village, the woman died. Her son-in-law then went up to the "doctor" saying, "You did not cure the woman, and, as I have paid you, I am going to kill you." The deceased admitted the fact, but did not attempt to run away. The three prisoners, all of whom were present during the interview, then went to their respective houses, obtained weapons, and, while the son-in-law speared the sorcerer, the other two hit him on the head with stone clubs.' *Annual Report*, 1910–11, p. 132.

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

his success in gardening and hunting. Panjari awoke from his sleep with these medicines, or at least the knowledge of them, in his possession, and in due course had passed them on to my informant. But the disciple cuts no ice without an inspiration of his own; so my informant in his turn receives dream visits from his own parents, and together they go into the gardens by night to beat the drums and sing, to make *tinogu*, as they call it, amid the taro. Another old man of the same village, anxious to bear out the evidence of his friend, declared he had heard this mysterious *tinogu*, and had screwed up his courage to the point of investigating it: before he came near enough to see the performers, however, they had taken flight and scattered. That the dead drummers were really in the garden is hardly more improbable than that a native should have ventured to investigate anything so spookish. But both stories, although hovering strangely between belief and fantasy, indicate that the concern of the Taro man is here with the spirits of the dead, not of the taro. So, again, we hear a Taro man crying as he holds up the shoot before planting,

Aiaka, mamaka, apije
Mother, father, grandfather
Ba nato kundo-gumbu
taro mine bring
Durate buroda piata imani
Set down in the garden, grant.

And we see, in the *ba oro*, or meeting-houses of the Taro men, little racks or platforms with food offerings, which they tell you are for the spirits of the dead. Lastly, in his subsidiary role of doctor, we see the Taro man, having practised all his remedies to no avail, setting up a spear with a bundle of rich ornaments for a placatory offering to the *sovai* who is afflicting the patient.

Such instances could easily be multiplied, but these are enough to show the trend which Taro medicine has taken. The original doctrine of the taro spirit seems to have survived principally in the neighbourhood of the

2: Williams E, G-5 (1923-1925) 1928
OJ23 Orokaiva OJ23

patient they thrust and withdraw quickly, or lay the spear point to his body and then snatch it away as if extracting something. Again, a Taro man may stroke the patient with *Kandoro* leaves (or other *ba sivo*) and then apply them to his own skin, or stick them in his armlet. The express explanation in this case was that the Taro man, through the medium of the taro medicine, was taking the ill-disposed spirit from the sick man back to himself, where it would do no harm.

These methods of the doctor are reinforced by piacatory offerings to the spirits. No uncommon sight is a spear driven into the ground before the door of a sick man and weighted with the valuable shell or boar's tusk ornaments which are the Orokaiva's wealth. These are offerings to the spirit who is causing the illness, and are meant to buy off his displeasure. They are set up commonly under directions from the Taro man, and in the event of a recovery they are likely to become his property. If the offerings be of no avail, however, and the patient should die, the Taro man is careful to explain that the ornaments are returned to his people.

The question of payment for the semi-professional services of the Taro doctor is not an easy one. Very often he endeavours to conceal the truth because he has formed the impression that such payments are discountenanced by the Government. It is certain, however, that the taking of payment is a regular practice. It has been pointed out already that the initiator (to use a set term) commonly receives some reward from the initiated (p. 33). The payment of the doctor is a different matter: it is easy to imagine that it might develop into a system of extortion. Sometimes, no doubt, with relatives and fellow villagers, the doctor's services are given free. One man assured me this was so, but afterwards, in a forgetful moment, admitted that his brother-in-law had given him a 'feather-hair' and a trade looking-glass in acknowledgement of a cure. Seldom, I believe, does the doctor send in a metaphorical account. Rather does